

## Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSM-03 OMB-01 IO-13 SAB-01 SSO-00

NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

A-01 OC-06 CCO-00 SY-05 PPT-01 SCA-01 SAM-01 ACDA-07

DHA-02 AID-05 ORM-02 TRSE-00 SCS-03 OPR-02 /105 W

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O P 151342Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9119

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY

CONFIDENTIAL DAMASCUS 5376

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE

SUBJECT: NEW SYRIAN/LEBANESE BORDER RESTRICTIONS

REF: STATE 202816, DAMASCUS 5352

1. PRELIMINARY CHECKS WITH FONMINISTRY AND WITH INDIVIDUAL SYRIAN AND LEBANESE APPLICANTS FOR PERMISSION TO CROSS BORDER HAVE DEVELOPED THE FOLLOWING INFOMATION BEYOND THAT CONTAINED DAMASCUS REFTEL.

2. FONMINISTRY ANTICIPATES NO PROBLEMS AFFECTING TRAVEL OF USG PERSONNEL. THOSE WITH DIPLOMATIC PASSPORTS WILL BE ASSISTED IN RECEIVING PERMITS TO ENTER LEBANON THROUGH FONMINISTRY PROTOCOL; THOSE WITH OFFICIAL PASSPORTS THROUGH MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. (COMMENT: OTHER SOURCES SAY NON-ARAB FOREIGNERS NOT A TARGET OF NEW RESTRICTIONS BUT WE KNOW OF ONE PRIVATE AMERICAN WHO WAS REFUSED ENTRY ATTEMPTING ENTER FROM LEBANON ON SATURDAY.)

3. WE UNABLE PREDICT DURATION OF NEW MEASURES

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BUT IN TYPICAL NEAR EASTERN FASHION THE NEW "SYSTEM" IS

BEING APPLIED SPOTTILY. ONE SYRIAN CITIZEN ENJOYING FAMILY TIES WITH MINDEFENSE TLAS WON RAPID APPROVAL FOR A LEBANESE FRIEND TO LEAVE SYRIA FOR BEIRUT APRIL 14. TRAVELER HAD TWO WEEKS WITHIN WHICH TO MAKE HIS ONE-WAY CROSSING FROM SYRIA INTO LEBANON USING PERMIT ADDRESSED TO THE "COMMANDER OF SYRIAN FORCES IN LEBANON." ANOTHER LEBANESE CITIZEN WAS GIVEN PERMIT BY INTERIOR MINISTRY TO ENTER LEBANON AND RETURN TO SYRIA WITHIN 24 HOURS.

4. MEA REP ADVISED EMBASSY THAT MEA LEBANESE EMPLOYEES IN DAMASCUS YESTERDAY RECEIVED ONE-WAY SINGLE EXIT PERMITS BUT OFFICIALS IN MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TOLD HIM THAT THEY PLANNED ISSUE 15 DAY ROUND-TRIP PERMITS TO THOSE "WELL AND FAVORABLY KNOWN" IF REQUESTED. A BRITISH STEWARDESS WITH THE MEA GROUP WAS TOLD SHE DID NOT REQUIRE SPECIAL PERMIT; HER REGULAR PASSPORT AND VISAS WERE CONSIDERED SUFFICIENT FOR TRAVEL. MEA REP IS SEEKING APPOINTMENT WITH MINISTER OF INTERIOR OR HIS DEPUTY TODAY TO TRY FOR MULTIPLE ENTRY PERMITS FOR MEA EMPLOYEES TRAVELING REGULARLY BETWEEN BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS.

5. NO ONE WHOM WE HAVE CONTACTED TO DATE HAS BEEN ABLE TO CLARIFY WHAT TYPE OF PERMIT TRAVELERS DEPARTING BEIRUT FOR DAMASCUS MUST OBTAIN. IN MEA'S CASE, REP WAS CONFIDENT THAT HIS BEIRUT OFFICE COULD OBTAIN WHAT-EVER PERMIT WAS REQUIRED.

6. SYRIAN CITIZEN WITH CLOSE CONTACTS WITH RECENTLY RETIRED MINISTER OF INTERIOR AND MINDEFENSE TLAS, COMMENTED AUGUST 15 THAT HE SUSPECTED THIS NEW SYSTEM WAS A SYRIAN NOT A LEBANESE INITIATIVE AND REFLECTED SYRIA'S PROHIBIT INTENT TO ENTRY OF THIS REGIME'S OPPONENTS. HE OBSERVED THAT DESCRIBING THE SYSTEM AS A TWO-WAY CONTROL WAS DESIGNED BASICALLY TO "DRESS UP" THE SYRIAN DESIRE FOR TIGHTENED POLICE MEASURES. HE ASCRIBED THE TIMING OF IMPLEMENTING THE NEW PROCEDURES TO THE FALL OF TEL ZATAR, WHICH FOLLOWED A SERIES OF EXPLOSIONS IN DAMASCUS ON WHICH WE HAVE REPORTED SEPARATELY.

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7. WE DEFER TO EMBASSY BEIRUT AS TO DEGREE TO WHICH NEW RESTRICTIONS WILL HAMPER MOVEMENT OF USG PERSONNEL FROM BEIRUT TO DAMASCUS. FSL TRANSFERRING TO EMBASSY DAMASCUS ON TDY PERMITTED TO ENTER SYRIA AUGUST 14 ON PRESENTATION OF EMBASSY BEIRUT LETTER IDENTIFYING HER AS USG EMPLOYEE. HER HUSBAND, NOT AN EMBASSY EMPLOYEE, WAS NOT PERMITTED, HOWEVER, TO ACCOMPANY HER ACROSS BORDER.

WE MUST ALSO DEFER TO BEIRUT ON THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ARRIVAL OF DISPLACED LEBANESE TO SYRIA. THE SYRO-LEBANESE BORDER WAS, IN ANY CASE, TOTALLY CLOSED ONLY ON AUGUST 13 AND WE DOUBT THAT THOSE LEBANESE WHO CAN ESTABLISH THEIR BONA FIDES AS SEEKING SAFE HAVEN IN OR THROUGH SYRIA WILL BE KEPT FROM COMING. THE MEASURES APPEAR TO BE DESIGNED TO GIVE CLOSER SCRUTINY TO SUCH CASES AND NOT PERMIT THE FREE ENTRY WHICH HAS CHARACTERIZED ARRIVALS FROM LEBANON OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS.

8. RE OUR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO AUH THROUGH DAMASCUS, THE FONMIN OFFICIAL WHO HAS ASSISTED US IN GETTING CUSTOMS CLEARANCES AND SYRIAN MILITARY AUTHORIZATION TO PERMIT TRUCKS LOADED WITH MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO EXIT SYRIA BELIEVES HE WILL BE ABLE SECURE FURTHER SUCH CLEARANCES IN THE FUTURE. HE IS CHECKING INTO THIS WITH THE MINISTRIES OF INTERIOR AND DEFENSE AND PROMISED ADVISE US ASAP. (WE ARE CURRENTLY HOLDING NO MEDICAL SUPPLIES FOR AUH AND HAVE NO WORD ON FURTHER SHIPMENTS IN PIPELINE FROM NEW YORK.)

9. COMMENT:

IT IS PREMATURE TO BE CATEGORIC ON THE EFFECTS THE NEW RESTRICTIONS WILL HAVE ON CARRYING OUT A TOTAL EVACUATION OVERLAND OF EMBASSY BEIRUT PERSONNEL SHOULD THIS NEED ARISE. I AM, HOWEVER, CONFIDENT WE WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE ALL NECESSARY ARRANGEMENTS FOR ADMISSION OF OUR PERSONNEL INTO SYRIA THROUGH OUR DIRECT CONTACTS WITH THE PRESIDENCY. SARG HAS BEEN FULLY RESPONSIVE IN DEALING WITH OUR PAST EVACUATIONS.

10. WE FIND PLAUSIBLE THE INTERPRETATION IN PARA SIX  
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ABOVE THAT THE INITIATIVE FOR THESE NEW RESTRICTIONS WAS SYRIA DESIGNED PRIMARILY TO IMPROVE SYRIAN INTERNAL SECURITY. AS FAR AS BLOCKING THE ENTRY OF SUBVERSIVES INTO THIS COUNTRY, HOWEVER, THEY HAVE BEEN APPLIED TOO LATE.

MURPHY

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